

To the editor:

The February 3, 2011 edition of the Westford Eagle featured an article titled, "Signs of trouble surfacing" in which the writer presents a one-sided view of the sign permitting process for the Boch Honda car dealership. Accompanying the article, readers are invited to participate in an on-line poll on the Westford Eagle's home page opening with the statement "Boch Honda recently won exceptions from the Board of Selectmen to erect oversized signs on the new Route 110 dealership. The approved sign permit allows the dealership to side-step the town's bylaw." The article irresponsibly leads readers to a false conclusion. The Board of Selectmen has made no exceptions in granting sign permits.

The Board of Selectmen has no authority to approve signage beyond that which is allowed by the Sign Bylaw. Objections raised by concerned residents as to the sign size were not ignored. The Board of Selectmen actually moved to reconsider and reduce the Boch signage to that allowed by the Sign Bylaw at its meeting on December 28th, 2010. The wording of the approval specifically cited approval contingent upon finding by the Land Use Director that the approval is consistent with the Westford Sign Bylaw.

The Land Use Director undertook many hours of a professional review on the project's signs, working with the applicant and concerned residents. The result was a further reduction in permitted signage. The Selectmen support the findings that the application now meets the Sign Bylaw and falls within their authority to grant a permit without prejudice. The writer does not acknowledge that changes in sign size were made.

The Selectmen appreciate residents raising awareness on this important Zoning bylaw, but would like to inform the writer that revising the Town's sign bylaw is not a new issue. Over a three-year period, the Comprehensive Master Plan Committee conducted many community outreach meetings with residents and business owners. A universal theme was to change the sign bylaw. Recognizing the concern, the Selectmen made it a 2010/2011 goal to redesign town's sign bylaw and ensure enforcement, in September of 2010. Singling out one business as the poster child for change is counterproductive to the effort already underway.

The Selectmen would like to communicate to readers of this letter what the article's writer failed to do. A sound, two-phased approach to revising the Westford Sign bylaw is underway under the guidance of the Land Use Director. The first phase is to clarify the existing Sign bylaw. With assistance from the League of Women Voters, the sign bylaw has been deconstructed and reassembled in a user-friendly, understandable format. The Land Use Director has proposed a change in permit granting authority to provide further clarity between Planning Board and Board of Selectmen responsibilities, streamlining town operations to ensure best use of staff time, reduced costs, and efficiencies. Residents will have an opportunity to vote on these changes to the Sign bylaw at Annual Town Meeting. The second phase will consist of more substantive changes to the bylaw. The Selectmen encourage all interested residents to get involved in a constructive dialog on the Town's Sign bylaw.

Westford Board of Selectmen